

INTRODUCTION

Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation takes three forms: architectural measured drawings, large-format photography, and written reports. These guidelines are intended to direct you in the production of the last.

Like the rest of HABS documentation, the historical reports serve many purposes, some of which we cannot foresee at the time the documentation is produced. At the least, the reports provide raw data in an accessible format for easy use by future researchers. At its best, a HABS historical report also synthesizes the information, making conclusions about the building being documented, either through an analysis of the building itself and its history, or by setting it in an appropriate context.

For guidance in research techniques, analysis of buildings, and writing history, see the "History" chapter of Recording Historic Structures, ed. John A. Burns (Washington: American Institute of Architects Press, 1989). That basic handbook of the HABS/HAER program describes ways of finding information on historic buildings and sites. These guidelines will discuss the arrangement of your information into a final report.

Historian's Duties

Although HABS receives documentation from many sources, these guidelines are directed at one producer of that documentation--the HABS summer historian. The Washington office of HABS fields teams at sites all over the country, usually for twelve-week terms in the summer. HABS also receives documentation from the mitigation program, wherein HABS documentation may be required in order to mitigate the adverse effects of a federal action. Generally this documentation is produced by contractors to various agencies under the supervision of regional office staff. Unlike the HABS summer projects, which terminate on a specific date, the mitigative documentation is not accepted by HABS until it has been edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress. The requirements for that documentation are therefore slightly different, and an historian preparing documentation under that program should contact the appropriate regional office.

The HABS summer historian is usually based in the field with a team of architects or other historians. The historian reports to two people: the head of the team (which is usually an architect if the team is composed largely of architects) and an historian in HABS's Washington office. For issues such as work hours, access to buildings, and general day-to-day administration, the field team leader is your boss. But for the content and format of the historical documentation, you are responsible to the historian in Washington, hereafter referred to as the supervisor.

Besides producing an historical report to the supervisor's specifications, the historian should also assist with the measured drawings and the large-format photography. The historian might uncover or verify historical information that will appear on the HABS drawings; the historian might find original drawings to aid the architects in their work; or the historian might discover information about additions or alterations helpful to understanding the building. In addition, the historian is responsible for writing the significance statement that appears on the title sheet of the measured drawings; the precise wording and punctuation should be approved by your supervisor before it is inked. The historian should be aware that the building will most likely be documented with large-format photography, and be mindful of the types of photographs that would best illustrate the historical issues. Photographers often appear on site after the team has gone home (winter being the best time to avoid excessive foliage), so it might be necessary to leave a list of desired photographs with your supervisor.

The architects and photographers can also be helpful to the historians. The building itself is one of the best research sources, and you can profit by the architects' experience with it. Walk through the building with the architects after they have become familiar with it. Not only will you learn things about the building's history, but the description that you write will benefit by the architects' views.

The historian will also take photographs. Black-and-white prints, taken early in the project, can serve as notes when researching or writing. Color slides are necessary for the final presentation to the community, when the historian may be called upon to present his/her findings. The architects will also be taking field photographs for their own use. If HABS provides the film and pays for the developing, the photographs or slides are HABS property.

Outlines and drafts will be reviewed by your supervisor at the time indicated on a schedule that you will both set at the beginning of the summer. Historians often have difficulty completing work within the standard twelve-week HABS summer season. Most historians could spend twice the amount of time available on any project. The extent of the documentation is determined by the time available; don't bite off more than you can chew! If you work steadily through the summer, you should be able to complete your project on time. Be sure to leave enough time to write the report; it is easy to get carried away with the research. Some historians work well by writing many drafts, adding information as they get it. Others like to accumulate everything they can before committing one word to paper. Either way, you should schedule your work to have a written draft by the beginning of August.

Eventually, the historical report will be sent to the Library of Congress with the historian's name on it as author, as well as project information including the editor, supervisor, and other members of the team. HABS encourages its historians to publish their findings or to present papers on the project. Once at the Library the report is in the public domain, and anyone can use the material.

Formats

Rather than prescribe a strict format for the written documentation, HABS prefers to let the kind of structure or site being documented dictate the final form of that documentation. At the same time, we want to give some guidance to our historians in the field. HABS recommends one of three formats to its historians: a narrative format, an outline format, and a short format. The narrative is divided into chapters or sections, emphasizing significant aspects of the building or site. The outline format prescribes aspects to be discussed, although sections can be expanded or deleted as appropriate. The short format is used when minimal information--not exceeding a page or two in length--has been collected.

The kinds of sites that are being documented by HABS have changed dramatically in the last few decades. HABS initially concentrated its efforts on buildings constructed before the Civil War--single buildings of simple forms, ideally suited to this outline format. More recently, HABS has been examining a broader range of resources, including collections of buildings, technologically complex buildings, landscapes, and urban plans. For these, narrative formats have proven to be more useful, often used in conjunction with the outline format when specific buildings or places were being discussed. Some examples of different kinds of projects, showing the different forms that the historical documentation took, follow.

Rancho Santa Fe, California, was planned in the early 1920s as a community of gentlemen-ranchers. Architect Lilian Rice designed an axially arranged commercial core and several buildings along it in a Spanish Revival style. Most of

the houses in the community were built in this same style. To document this unusual community, the historian produced a narrative overview of its development, and HABS outline-format reports on the fifteen individual buildings that were documented by measured drawings.

The steel industry of southwestern Pennsylvania required vast amounts of refractory brick--brick that would withstand the high temperatures of the blast furnaces. Refractory brickyards were established in the region, and workers were housed in a variety of company towns. The historian examined eight towns, some carefully planned, others haphazardly built, in a narrative report with sub-sections on each town.

Pierre L'Enfant designed the city of Washington, D.C., in 1791, overlaying a street grid with diagonal avenues intersecting at circles and squares. The plan results in some spectacular vistas and highlights important buildings. The historians produced a narrative overview of the development of the city in respect to this plan and a look at other planned capitals and cities worldwide. The HABS outline format was modified to accommodate the history and description of specific avenues and parks.

Monocacy National Battlefield includes two farmhouses documented by HABS. Although the houses have some history in common--their roles as farms in the Monocacy valley and their relation to the Battle of Monocacy--the houses were documented with separate reports, so as not to link two entities that were historically not part of a unit. The outline-format history was complemented by analysis, in the Historical Context section, of each house in relation to the battle, and the role of each as farms in the valley. One of these reports is included as an example in this manual.

As demonstrated by these projects, a flexible approach is best when trying to fit groups of buildings and sites into the HABS collection. Discuss the format with your supervisor.

Completing the Historical Report

The historian's report will be edited in the HABS office before it is sent to the Library of Congress, where it is available to the public. If the supervisor has approved drafts of the report during the summer, the editing will be light. If the historian leaves everything until the last minute, and drops a draft on the supervisor's desk the last day of the project, extensive editing may be required. If you request it, we will send you a copy after editing for your approval.

All historical reports should be prepared on an IBM-compatible computer using WordPerfect software. Keep your formatting simple, as the report will be printed out in the HABS office, probably in a different font than you used. If you are not using WordPerfect, keep your formatting extremely simple--charts and graphs will not translate. At the end of the summer, send in a hard copy of your report, at least one disk (you may want to send another as insurance), all of your notes, and all the equipment and supplies you were provided at the beginning of the summer. Your notes are HABS's property, and it is important for us to have these on hand during the editing process. You may xerox anything you want for your own files. At the completion of editing, the notes are usually discarded; if you want a local repository to receive them, let your supervisor know.